

Dec. 12, 1977

Venerable Phra Dhammadhara,

A few days ago I received your letter and it was the condition for many kusala cittas, for both Lodewijk and me. You started your letter saying that you trust that we 'are managing to find moments in a day for stringing a further flower or two on the garland of good deeds which the Dhammapada recommends that we make of our lives.'

I looked it up: Dhammapada, Ch. IV, 53:

'As from a heap of flowers many a garland is made, even so many good deeds should be done by one born a mortal.'

Richard quoted what you had said in Adelaide once and I found it also a good reminder:

'As Phra Dhammadhara reminded us when he was in Adelaide, if you are not going up (with kusala) then you are going down. You can't coast along when you are developing sati. You are either accumulating kusala or it is akusala.'

Richard also wrote that when Jill was staying in Adelaide they talked about kusala: 'we discussed how much attachment there is to kusala and how pleased we are whenever the citta has been kusala. In fact the topic of kusala citta and many different types of kusala came up quite a lot in our morning talks over breakfast or in the evening when preparing meals. The most important thing was to realize how little kusala there really is—the minutes, hours, days or even weeks that could go by without kusala....'

Good reminder this one: if you are not going up, you are going down. And then our attachment when there is kusala. Richard wrote me another quotation from one of your letters and we find it a good reminder, helping us to remember how attached to sati we are:

'I believe that our preoccupation with trying to ensure the very best conditions for the development of sati reflects this lack of true appreciation of the value of being aware of what has already appeared now, by conditions, as well as revealing rather a strong attachment, more often than not, to that old 'self' who has now entrenched himself firmly in our lives as 'the Dhamma student and practitioner'. The old woes and worries may have eased, but now we are oppressed by the frustration we feel when there are insufficient signs of progress.'

And Richard adds:

A very valuable reminder that and so true. Now it's "me" who knows all about the Dhamma. Lobha has another object to cling to.

Talking about Richard, he is so very thoughtful in sharing Dhamma and thinks of sending others useful things like tapes and books. I just received tapes of you speaking in Adelaide. He

writes in 'Metta' short simple articles explaining what it is we take for self: the five khandhas. He prepared with Jill a syllabus, introducing Abhidhamma at the University. Jill gave a talk about the ten puñña kiriya vatthus. I took her idea when I was asked to give a talk at a temple in the South of Holland on the occasion of Kathin. I looked up Khun Sujin's talk in Wat Saket about this subject and discovered that the tenth one—straightening one's views—~~can be with every kind of kusala.~~ (And this is also in the Atthasālini.) ^{With} any kind of kusala, every small gesture, ~~there can be the realisation of the value of kusala,~~ ^{understanding of cause} and ^{and result.} When there is akusala we are like fools, when there is kusala we start to be 'wise'. I often remember Khun Sujin's words when I have to speak: 'And what about the speaker?' Saying things out loud for an audience is a helpful reminder for myself as well. Ever since, it has reminded me not to despise any kind of kusala appropriate to the occasion, and not to put it off, even though thīna and middha are there too.

And when explaining about seeing to others, 'what about the speaker? There could be awareness of seeing at that very moment.' Or at least the study with awareness of that characteristic. This morning on the tape of Khun Sujin: 'When you read about seeing, there can be awareness of seeing.'

I did the lecture in Dutch and then I repeated in English and briefly in Thai, since there were several nationalities present. The abbot wants to get people more interested in Abhidhamma and requested me to translate my 'Abhidhamma' into Dutch, which I have started. At the same time I am making some revisions to the English, having in mind a future reprint.

Two monks from France were present, one Laotian, one American (Phra Santicitto who inquired after you). After my lecture, meditation instruction was due (according to Achaan Cha's method) but instead the Laotian monk said that he was not sure one should require people to sit. He reminded us that there is the corpse outside and also the corpse inside ('pai nai'). He pointed out the shape of his head, a skull. Very good reminder. Phra Santicitto asked me how I could get people interested in kusala when they were not used to kusala. The Laotian monk asked about citta which falls away and still there is remembrance. I do not know whether meditation followed, but it was time for me to leave. I had also in this lecture taken the opportunity to explain what is citta and how kusala citta is conditioned; what cetasika is, etc.

The abbot will publish 'Abhidhamma in Daily Life' chapter by chapter in his quarterly.

Now to come back to your letter, I wish to quote for the benefit of others the words you wrote to Lodewijk, thinking of the

adversities one is bound to have when dealing with other people who may be unjust or disagreeable:

Having some small idea perhaps, Lodewijk, of the rigours of life you must have to lead among your colleagues, I'm anxious to encourage you to more kusala, in spite of the difficulties you face—with the following lines from 'Lamp of the Law' (Translation in Wheel series by Ven. Piyadassi Thera of a Sanskrit Buddhist text by Sankara):

'Seeing well, he seems to be one blind;
Hearing well, he seems not 'ware of sound;
Knowing, he seems a fool of some kind;
Powerful, he seems to weakness bound.'

It is a description of one who manages "to hold himself well in, under the greatest provocation". What a sacrifice to deliberately choose to appear weak and foolish for the sake of "not undoing or slighting another at all, anywhere" (Mettā Sutta). Yet it is precisely and solely by gladly giving up what is of relative value thus (Ratana sutta-commentary) that the very things that we, at other times, did otherwise seek to protect (by not appearing weak or foolish etc.); are actually made secure and safe for us.

I looked up the commentary to the Ratana sutta, VI, 129, and it is in the story of Sankha and Susīma. The Buddha showed cause and effect of deeds. In a former life he was Sankha and his son Susīma became a Pacceka Buddha and later passed finally away. The father Sankha did honour to the Pacceka Buddha's shrine terrace and looked after it. The Buddha showed how these actions produced kusala vipākas in his present life, in the way of great ceremonial honour. All this honour was due 'to the might of former acts of giving up what is of relative value.' He spoke this stanza:

Now if a man should see full pleasure
In giving up relative pleasure,
Then let him give up relative pleasure
Seeing, steadfast, full pleasure (there).

A footnote gives the explanation: 'The point of this verse is not that one should merely give up a lesser pleasure for a greater, but that if one can come to see the pleasure in renunciation of relative pleasures as the greatest, then one should choose that, and renounce those.'

The giving up of one's defilements is the highest nekkhamma. When others are disagreeable it is a sacrifice not to talk back. One may seem weak and foolish. But keeping in mind not to slight anyone is kusala, and this is what is valuable.

You also quote a verse of the Dhammapada (V, 74), mention-

ing that it contains a very good warning about the peril inherent in blindly accumulating more and more māna (conceit):

'Let the laymen and the monks both think highly of what I have done. In every work, great or small, let them follow me.' Such is the aspiration of the fool; his self-seeking and pride increase.

Yes, we think it wonderful if monks and laymen think highly of our good deeds. This tendency has been accumulated, and it is good to know it. If we do not know it we accumulate more and more.

You made a small passage in the Expositor come to life, the passage about a dog, and it is a small sentence one may so easily overlook: Exp. P. 471, (The Summary, Rootconditions, 365). It is about craving: "'Fluster" is the name of that craving by means of which people go about agitated in places where anything is to be gained, like dogs wagging their tails....' You mention that 'Manipulating, fawning and other such like deceitful behaviour (of which we may all be much more guilty than we realise) are, I think particularly ugly forms of attachment.' You then mentioned the Exp. text and added: 'in eager and concerned expectation of some tidbit? Yesterday I saw the temple dog here currying and winning favour in the most nauseating manner. When a third party entered the picture with a stick to hasten the creature outside, this normally placid and obedient animal, from his new-found position of strength at the feet of the head monk, then turned quite nasty, revealing clearly how deceptive surface amiability and docility can be (Vedehikā and her maidservant clever Kālī)....'

You asked me to write a bit more about seeing things as a 'whole'. Seeing things as a whole, not knowing, not seeing that there are only elements, nāma-elements and rūpa-elements. Seeing things as a whole: confusing all the different doorways. Seeing things as a whole: we 'see' people, we notice the whole body, we touch books but what is really there? Only different elements which appear one at a time. Visible object is a rūpa-element which can be seen through the eyes, hardness is another rūpa-element which can be experienced through the bodysense. But when there is the whole body, or even a hand or a finger which we think exists or people or trees or books, we cling to 'wholes', 'stories', concepts. But there are only elements, appearing one at a time.

When I had read your words encouraging me to take up Pāli again, there were conditions for me to run to the bookcase and take out my Pāli books and start again. I will see what cittas will do. I would like to hear more examples from you about how Pāli conditions kusala citta. When I am really motivated I can do it.

And then, this study can remind us of the other study, the study with awareness of what appears now. But for a long time I felt a great gap, when writing about realities and quoting from the commentaries. Your words were the right condition. You write it in such a determined way that I trust that it will help with kusala, but it all depends of course on the citta which study. When I am nodding over my books late, I find that I always have a taste for Pāli, I still like to go over some rows of words, when I am too sleepy to read other things.

Finally, I appreciate the letter written by the kind Singhalese monk, he wrote it with kusala citta. But in the meantime you may not be at the same place.

Thanking you again for the letter, also on behalf of Lodewijk,

with best wishes,

Nina

May I add that I always remember something you said about speaking: you would rather not speak 'when the kusala citta would not come'. It truly helps me when listening to someone who preaches the wrong practice. To remember that one cannot help someone else but if kusala citta motivates the speaking. Then we may consider: is that person somehow giving us an opportunity to say maybe one line which could be of help? Because that is what matters, not to argue against him. It helped me a lot the other day when I had dosa and conceit.